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ISLAMIC SHARIA AND THE MISTREATMENT OF WOMEN

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President Donald Trump has been chastised for the vulgar mistreatment of women. As the famed sports columnist Christine Brennan put it, "When you're in business with Donald Trump, the man who appeared on the infamous *Access Hollywood* videotape bragging that he could sexually assault women without having to worry about the ramifications, your values start to fade."[1] According to Brennan, the very notion that a major golf tournament like the U.S. Women's Open should be played at Trump National is an affront to women everywhere.

The alleged mistreatment of women by Trump, however, pales in comparison to the mistreatment of women shackled by sharia. Yet a deafening silence continues to pervade the West. No less a luminary than former president Barack Obama considers all such noise a distraction or, worse, a distortion. Speaking from a mosque in Baltimore, he decried "distorted media portrayals" of Islam. "I've had mothers write and say, 'my heart cries every night,' thinking about how her daughter might be treated at school. A girl from Ohio, 13 years old, told me, 'I'm scared.' A girl from Texas signed her letter 'a confused 14-year-old trying to find her place in the world.'" Obama insists we know the facts. "For more than a thousand years, people have been drawn to Islam's message of peace."[2]

Indeed, according to Obama, "the very word itself, Islam, comes from *salam* — peace."[3] The Qur'an, of course, does not define the word *Islam* as "peace" — *Islam* means "submission (to the will of Allah)."[4] And many who have experienced sharia firsthand do not share Obama's enthusiasm. While his heart aches for how Muslim girls are treated in school, their hearts ache for how girls are treated in sharia. What Obama lauds as a wonderful system of law and life, they loathe as systematic oppression.

In *Heretic*, former Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali explains the horror of sharia for women:

> *Repeatedly, women are considered under the code to be worth at most "half a man." Sharia subordinates women to men in a multitude of ways: the requirement of guardianship by men, the right of men to beat their wives, the right of men to have unfettered sexual access to their wives, the right of men to*

> *practice polygamy, and the restriction of women's legal rights in divorce cases, in estate law, in cases of rape, in court testimony, and in consent to marriage.*[5]

In her book, *Cruel and Usual Punishment*, Egyptian-born author Nonie Darwish explains what it was like to grow up in Egypt under sharia law: "For the first thirty years of my life, I lived as a virtual slave. I was a bird in a cage; a second-class citizen who had to watch what I said even to my close friends. Under Islamic law I had to live in a gender-segregated environment and always be aware that the legal and social penalty for 'sin' could end my life."[6] Darwish goes on to explain that sharia "deals with all aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business law, contract law, marriage, divorce, child rearing and custody, sexuality, sin, crime, and social issues. It makes no distinction between public and private life, treating all aspects of human relations as governable by Allah's law. The Sharia laws are based on the Qur'an and hadiths (sayings and example of the Prophet) as well as centuries of debate, interpretation, and precedent."[7] Says Darwish, "It allows a woman seen without a headdress to be flogged, punishes rape victims, and calls for beheading for adultery. I never questioned or challenged it — or dared to even think about its validity."[8]

As "a student of history," Obama understands all of this and more.[9] He is also well aware that Muslim women in the West are in no position to expose what many may consider hypocrisy. As Darwish makes plain, Muslim women who complain about the inequities of sharia suffer untold consequences: "The Qur'an, various hadiths, and Sharia all prescribe severe punishment for the rebellious woman." Indeed, "a rebellious woman can be beaten by her husband and ordered by the Sharia court to never leave the home without his permission in *beit al taa*, meaning 'house of obedience,' a practice that amounts to house arrest."[10]

When Darwish and Hirsi Ali write about sharia law, they are not blowing smoke. Like Obama, both grew up in a Muslim context.[11] Darwish writes,

> A Muslim woman who commits adultery is to be stoned to death; unmarried girls who have sex must be flogged; women's testimony in court is half the value of a man; women get half the inheritance of a man; there is no community property between husband and wife; if a woman is killed, her indemnity money is half the indemnity money of a man; if her family follows Shafi'i law, then her clitoris must be removed at a young age — that is female castration in order for the man to make sure her sexual appetite is suppressed; she needs her guardian's permission for marriage or else it is void; she needs her husband's or male relative's permission for travel; she must cover all her body except her face and hands.[12]

In short, "While Islam claims respect for the woman's body, the laws do not support that claim. Sharia stones women for adultery, but men are not stoned for rape — such inequity contradicts any claims of Islam's honor of women."[13]

Yet Obama waxes eloquent regarding Islam's "proud tradition of tolerance" and ominously warns Westerners against "impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion *as they see fit*" (emphasis added). In Obama's world, impeding the religio-sociopolitical practices of Islam is nothing less than a manifestation of rank hostility, and "we can't disguise *hostility* towards any religion behind the pretence (*sic*) of liberalism" (emphasis added).[14] Behind the rhetoric of Obama lurks the ever-present specter of censorship. To question the "proud tradition" of sharia is now considered "hostility." And to impede "Muslim citizens from practicing religion *as they see fit*" is characterized as Islamophobia.

If consistent with his own dogmatism, Obama would have little tolerance for those who question the right of a Muslim man to hit a rebellious wife who refuses to allow him "*full lawful sexual enjoyment of her person.*" Why? Because in accordance with sharia ordinances, "*it is permissible for him to hit her if he believes that hitting her will bring her back to the right path*" (emphasis added).[15]

What for Obama is tolerant, for Hirsi Ali and Darwish is terrifying. From their vantage point, the thirteen-year-old girl who wrote to the president had a right to be scared. Scared not only because the then-most-powerful man in the world considered Islam enlightened but scared because of what she will be subjected to under its legalities.

Hirsi Ali tells the horrifying story of a thirteen-year-old girl in Somalia who was found guilty of adultery after reporting that she had been raped by three men. Unlike the thirteen-year-old girl from Ohio who told Obama that she was scared because someone might scorn her, Aisha Ibrahim Duhulow — named after the prophet Muhammad's nine-year-old wife — was dragged, screaming and flailing, into a stadium in Kismayo to be stoned. "It took four men to bury her up to her neck in the hole. Then fifty men spent ten minutes pelting her with rocks and stones. After ten minutes had passed, there was a pause. She was dug out of the ground and two nurses examined her to see if she was still alive. Someone found a pulse and breathing. Aisha was returned to the hole and the stoning continued." Following the sharia stoning, "a local sheik told a radio station that Aisha had provided evidence, confirmed her guilt, and 'was happy with the punishment under Islamic law.'"[16]

For social commentator Rod Dreher, "The idea that someone as robustly vulgar, fiercely combative, and morally compromised as Trump will be an avatar for the restoration of Christian morality and social unity is beyond delusional."[17] Likewise, for social commentators in the West to downplay sharia's mistreatment of women is beyond dangerous.

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NOTES

1 Christine Brennan, "USGA Struggles to Denounce Sexual Assault on Eve of U.S. Women's Open," *USA Today*, July 11, 2017, www.usatoday.com/story/sports/columnist/brennan/2017/07/11/usga-denounce-sexual-assault-u-s-womens-open-donaldtrump/469245001/.

2 Similarly, former president George W. Bush pronounced the teachings of Islam "good and peaceful." (See "Remarks by the President at Islamic Society of Baltimore," White House Office of the Press Secretary, February 3, 2016, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/03/remarks-president-islamic-society-baltimore; and George W. Bush, "Address to Joint Session of Congress Following 9/11 Attacks," September 20, 2001, American Rhetoric, www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm.)

3 "Remarks by the President at Islamic Society of Baltimore."

4 As the venerable Muslim scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali rightly conveys in his widely respected translation of the Qur'an, "The Religion before Allah is Islam [*l-is'l◎mu*] (submission to His Will)" (3:19) (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, tenth ed. [Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1999, 2001]. Pickthall's translation of Qur'an 3:19 is also direct: "Lo! Religion with Allah (Is) the Surrender [*l-is'l◎mu*] (to His Will and Guidance)" (*The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, trans. Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall [New York: New American Library, n.d.], 64).

5 Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 143. See especially Qur'an 2:223, 282; 4:3, 34; and the influential Sunni commentary, Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller: The Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, rev. ed., Nuh Ha Mim Keller, ed. and trans. (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1991, 1994), 522–23 [m3.13; m3.15]; 540–42, [m10.12].

6 Nonie Darwish, *Cruel and Usual Punishment* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), ix.

7 Ibid., 4. A mainstream Muslim teaching article states, "Islam is an all-embracing way of life. It extends over the entire spectrum of life, showing us how to conduct all human activities in a sound and wholesome manner." Thus, "When we read the Quran or the Prophetic traditions, we find instructions regarding all aspects of life: political, social, economic, material, ethical, national and international. These instructions provide us with all the details needed to perform a certain act." The implications of this comprehensive doctrine include, for example, the idea that "a spiritual belief that does not deal with social behavior, economic relations and international organizations is as erroneous as the social doctrine that does not consider spiritual belief, morality and behavior." "Islam: A Complete Code of Life," Islamweb.net, April 8, 2014, www.islamweb.net/en/article/111867/islam-acomplete-code-of-life; and "Islam: A Comprehensive Way of Life," Islamweb.net, April 17, 2016, www.islamweb.net/en/article/158625/islam-%EF%BF%BD%EF%BF%BD-a-comprehensive-way-of-life.

8 Darwish, *Cruel and Usual Punishment*, ix.

9 See "Remarks by the President at Cairo University, 6-04-09," White House Office of the Press Secretary, obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-presidentcairo-university-6-04-09.

10 Darwish, *Cruel and Usual Punishment*, 63. See Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller,* 540–42, [m10.12].

11 See the 2012 five-part series by Middle East and Islam specialist Daniel Pipes in the *Washington Times* concerning Obama's early Muslim connections, including "Pipes: 'Barry Was Muslim': Teachers and Friends Say Obama Studied Koran in School,'" Washington Times, September 10, 2012, www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/sep/10/barry-was-muslim/.

12 Darwish, *Cruel and Usual Punishment*, 65. Muhammad commanded stoning for adultery, as recorded in the *ahadith*, *Sahih al-Bukhari* 9.83.37; *Sahih Muslim*, 17.4192, 17.4193, and 17.4196.

13 Ibid., 66.

14 "Remarks by the President at Cairo University, 6-04-09."

15 Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller*, 541–42, [m10.12].

16 Hirsi Ali, *Heretic*, 149.

17 Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Sentinel, 2017), 79.